

INTRODUCTION

Although the Albemarle Area has grown slowly in population for many decades, many changes have been taking place in the region. Farming is declining rapidly as an employer of labor and a way of life, while growing in productivity and income. Forestry is being revolutionized by scientific, corporate management. New and expanding industries adjacent to the region and within it are providing new employment opportunities, but not at the rate needed to reverse out-migration trends. The Outer Banks have become increasingly important as recreation and vacation areas. Other waterfront areas on the sounds and rivers have become magnets attracting second home developments and new businesses.

The region has its share of problems, however. Its location away from the major population complexes of the state makes it relatively isolated, a situation not improved by generally poor highway access. Because of its proximity to the growing and dynamic Norfolk Metropolitan Area, it is dependent economically and culturally on a locality within which it has no political ties or influence. Its waterways and wetlands in the past have served as barriers to land travel and helped contribute to its isolation. A heavy economic dependence on agriculture and forestry, which are non-growth industries in terms of employment, has ensured heavy out-migration for many years. Although the recreation potential of the region has been known for many years, relatively little has been done to exploit it until recently. Small governmental units, which abound in the Albemarle Area, have each tended to go separate ways, dividing and subdividing the limited financial resources available to provide services and facilities for the region. Fortunately, it appears that this pattern is beginning to change.

The major assets of the region are its people, its land, its water areas, and its climate. As is true in most predominately rural places, the people in the Albemarle Area suffer from low educational levels, low per capita incomes, and a relatively high unemployment rate. In addition, a considerable number of the population are underemployed, because of the seasonable nature of the available work.

The land development potential of the Albemarle Area has never been exploited adequately. Even though the region was the first section settled in North Carolina, relatively little has been done until recent years to develop and utilize its extensive wetlands. New technology and corporate management, well backed financially, promise to turn land that has traditionally been considered worthless, except for hunting, into highly productive fields and forests. The old farms and forests on the better drained lands have become much more productive as farmers have been educated to the need for better management and the adoption of scientific practices.